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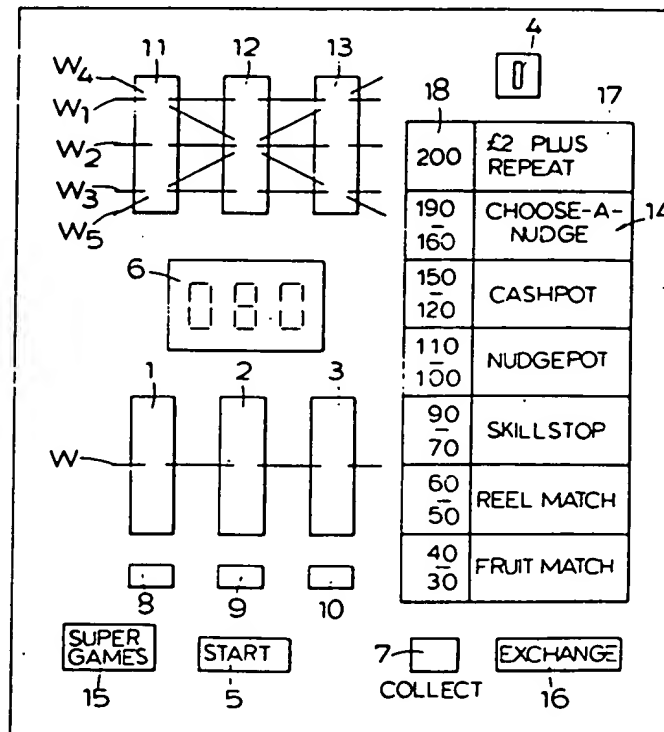
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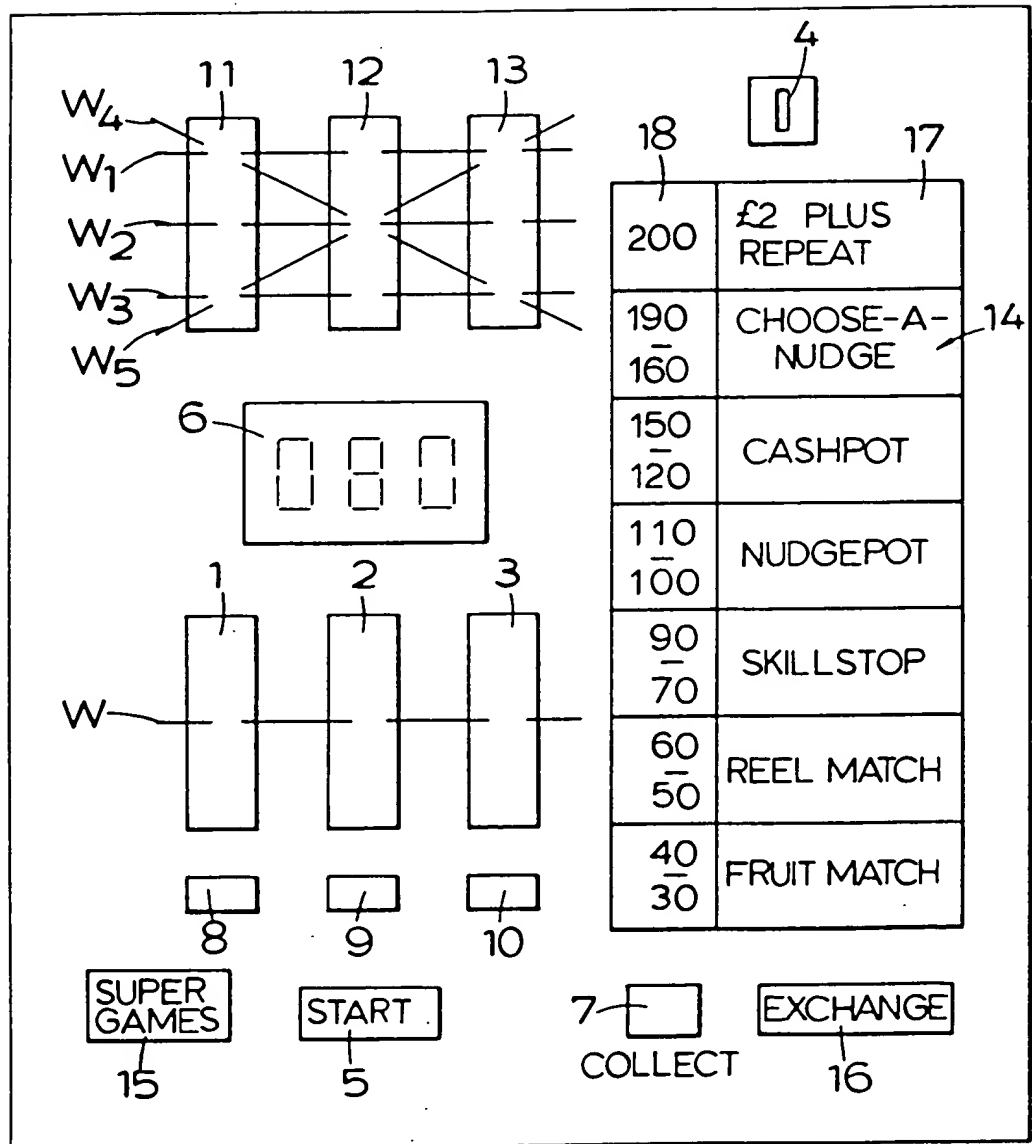
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(54) Gaming and amusement machines

(57) A gaming machine, particularly a fruit machine is operated to provide a combination of symbols on reels (1-3), certain combinations resulting in the award of a credit which is stored in a credit meter (6). A predetermined number of credits accumulated over a number of games may be exchanged for a special feature, or one of a plurality of special features selected from a display panel (14). Alternatively, the machine may be provided with a second set of reels (11-13) on which a "super game" can be played when a predetermined number of credits are stored in the credit meter.



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GAMING AND AMUSEMENT MACHINES

This invention relates to gaming or amusement-with-prizes machines of the kind generally known as 'fruit machines', in which three, or sometimes more, reels carrying symbols are set in rotation and then stop in turn at random intervals and if the resulting combination of symbols on the three (or more) reels appearing on a given line in the display, the 'win line', is one which has been designated a winning combination, the player receives an award or a credit. Instead of actual reels, it is known to use other forms of display which simulate rotating reels to a greater or lesser degree, for example the Panascope, or a video screen on which images of the symbols appear. Such machines will hereinafter be referred to as of the kind set forth.

Many special features are provided nowadays in fruit machines, indeed they have to some extent taken over from the basic game, in that most of the bigger wins are obtained by the special features rather than by the initial result when the reels first come to a halt. The special features may be awarded at random intervals following non-winning games on the reels, but more commonly these days they are awarded following completion of a so-called 'ladder' or 'trail' feature in which steps in the ladder or trail may be illuminated as a result of certain symbols, e.g. symbols bearing superimposed numbers, appearing on the win line. When the 'ladder' or 'trail' is completed, a jackpot prize or another special feature which may result in a jackpot prize may be awarded.

Often a plurality of special features may be provided on a fruit machine with some features offering

a greater chance to win a higher prize than other features. The plurality of special features may also be arranged in a 'feature ladder' or trail' and when the player is awarded one special feature he may be given the opportunity to gamble between either gaining another special feature higher up on the feature ladder or trail or losing the special feature altogether.

Amongst the many special features which are provided nowadays in fruit machines, one which has proved popular is the so-called 'nudge' feature, by which the player is sometimes given the opportunity at the end of a game which did not result in a win, to advance one or more of the reels by a single step, or a sometimes more than one step, to bring a fresh symbol onto the win line and thereby change what was a losing combination into a winning one. This feature may be offered apparently at random after a non-winning game, or a number of 'nudges' determined in one of a variety of ways may be awarded as a special feature after completion of a 'ladder' or 'trail'.

It is also known to provide an 'exchange feature' in which a 'feature ladder' is disposed alongside a column indicating the different prize values achievable when different winning combinations of symbols come to rest on the win line and on certain occasions the player may be offered the chance to exchange a prize awarded from a single game on the reels for the equivalent feature corresponding to that prize value. For example, a 20p prize may be equivalent to 2 nudges in the feature ladder, a 40p prize may be equivalent to 4 nudges in the feature ladder, and so on.

It is an aim of the invention is to provide a different and particularly attractive way of making a

special feature or a plurality of special features available to the player.

According to the present invention there is provided a gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine of the kind set forth in which credits are awarded when winning combinations of symbols on the reels appear on a 'win line' of the display, the credits being stored in a credit meter, and means are provided which enable the player to exchange a predetermined number of credits accumulated in the credit meter over a plurality of games for a special feature or one of a plurality of special features.

It is generally envisaged that the player will be given the choice either to collect a prize, generally in the form of cash or tokens, which is equivalent to the credits that have been accumulated, or to exchange the predetermined number of credits for the special feature.

The present invention adds more variety to the basic game on the fruit machines involving the rotating reels and may give the player the chance to gain larger prizes from the special features than the prize equivalent to the predetermined number of credits.

Two or more special features may be provided which are preferably arranged on a display in an ascending order with a higher feature offering a greater chance to win a large prize than a lower feature, a greater number of predetermined credits being required to be accumulated in the credit meter for the player to be able to exchange those credits for a higher feature.

Alternatively, or additionally, a predetermined number of accumulated credits may be exchanged for one or more special feature games played on the same or a different set of reels in which there is an enhanced possibility of winning large prizes than in the standard game played on the reels. The enhanced possibility of winning large prizes may be achieved by having an increased number of win lines in the special feature game.

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An embodiment of the invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawing which shows the display area of a fruit machine.

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The display area has the usual elements which enable a game to be played on the fruit machine, namely a first set of rotatable reels 1, 2 and 3 carrying symbols behind a first set of windows, a coin and/or token entry slot 4, a 'start' button 5 which when pressed sets the reels in rotation until they stop in turn at random intervals, a credit meter 6 in the form of a 3-digit display in which credits awarded when designated winning combinations of symbols appear on a win line W in the display are stored until the player decides to collect a prize equivalent to the accumulated credits by pressing a 'collect' button 7. There may also be 'hold' or 'nudge' buttons 8, 9 and 10 associated with the first set of reels 1, 2 and 3.

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The fruit machine illustrated in the drawing differs from conventional machines in that it has a second set of reels 11, 12 and 13 behind a second set of windows and a special feature display area 14. The machine also has a 'super games' button 15 which, when the player has accumulated a predetermined number of

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credits in the credit meter 6 from wins over a plurality of games on the first set of reels 1, 2 and 3, allows the player to exchange those credits for one or more 'super games' on the second set of reels 11, 12 and 13. There are three horizontal win lines W_1 , W_2 and W_3 and two diagonal win lines W_4 and W_5 on the display associated with the second set of reels 11, 12 and 13 which provide an enhanced possibility of winning larger prizes from 'super games' played on the second set of reels than the chance of winning prizes from the standard game on the first set of reels 1, 2 and 3.

As an alternative to the 'super games' played on the second set of reels, when the player has accumulated a number of credits above a predetermined minimum number from wins on the first set of reels 1, 2 and 3 and/or from wins on the second set of reels 11, 12 and 13 the player may either collect a prize equivalent to that number of credits by pressing the collect button 7 or exchange those credits for an equivalent special feature displayed on the special feature display area 14 by pressing an 'exchange' button 16.

As shown in the drawing, the special feature display area 14 has a column 17 of seven special features alongside a column 18 indicating the predetermined number of credits which must be won before those credits can be exchanged for a corresponding feature. The special features are arranged in an ascending order in the feature column 17 with a higher feature in the column offering a greater chance of winning a large prize than a lower feature in the column. For example, if the maximum cash prize which can be won from a single game is £2, the top

special feature may be a £2 award with an approximately fifty-fifty chance of the feature being repeated in the following game. The other special features are preferably of the kind which are conventionally awarded following completion of a so-called 'ladder' or 'trail' on fruit machines, e.g. 'jackpot' awards of 'nudges', cash or tokens, skill features or other 'nudge' or 'fruit match' features in which there is a lower chance of achieving the maximum cash prize. As shown in the drawing greater numbers of credits must be accumulated in the credit meter to enable the player to exchange the accumulated credits for the higher special features in column 17.

It will be appreciated that several modifications may be made to the fruit machine shown in the drawings without departing from the scope of the invention. For instance, the second set of reels 11, 12 and 13 may be omitted with the special feature games or 'super games' being played on the first set of reels but with a greater number of win lines e.g. five being provided instead of the single win line W available in the standard games. In an alternative modification, win lines W_1 , W_3 , W_4 and W_5 may be omitted and a smaller number of different symbols provided on the second set of reels 11, 12 and 13 so that there is a greater chance of a winning combination appearing on the single win line W_2 than of a winning combination appearing on win line W of the first set of reels 1, 2 and 3.

CLAIMS

- 5 1. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine of the kind set forth in which the credits are stored in a credit meter, and means are provided which enable a predetermined number of credits accumulated in the credit meter over a plurality of games to be exchanged
10 for a special feature game or one of a plurality of special features.
- 15 2. A machine according to claim 1 in which means are provided which enable a predetermined number of accumulated credits to be exchanged either for a special feature or at the choice of the user, a prize equivalent to the accumulated credits to be collected.
- 20 3. A machine according to claim 1 or claim 2 in which means are provided such that larger prizes may be obtained from the special features than a prize equivalent to the predetermined number of accumulated credits.
- 25 4. A machine according to any previous claim in which at least two special features are provided, arranged on a display in ascending order with a higher feature requiring a greater predetermined number of accumulated credits to be exchanged than a lower feature, a higher
30 feature offering a greater chance of gaining a larger prize than a lower feature.
- 35 5. A machine according to any previous claim in which the arrangement is such that the said special feature game is played on a different set of reels from the first-mentioned reels.

6. A machine according to claim 5 in which means are provided to increase the possibility of winning larger prizes in the special feature games than in the standard game.

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7. A machine according to claim 6 in which the special feature games have an increased number of win-lines.

10 8. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine substantially as described herein with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawing.

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